

# Requirements for Maintaining Group B Water System Compliance

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## Background

Group B systems, generally serving 2 to 14 connections, are public water systems not subject to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). This summary provides basic information to owners of existing Group B public water systems about operating requirements which must be met in order to comply with Chapter 246-291 WAC. Refer to the WAC for a complete list of requirements. For special instructions regarding surface water or groundwater under the influence of surface water (GWI) sources, contact the Department of Health.

It should be noted that the Washington Department of Health and local health jurisdictions may share the responsibility for administering drinking water regulations for Group B public water systems. Therefore, when the term "Department" is used, it refers to whichever agency is responsible in that particular county. Contact the local health jurisdiction to find out which agency is responsible.

## Public Health Issues

Group B systems, although not governed by the SDWA, are subject to state law and local ordinances regarding water quality and operations. Currently the state is experiencing a significant increase in the number of potentially nonviable Group B systems. This rapid increase has been encouraged by the statutory exemptions from the state's water right permits process for wells that use small amounts of water.

## Key Requirements

**Sampling:** The following are minimum monitoring requirements. The Department may require additional sampling. All samples must be analyzed by a Department of Health certified lab. Lists of laboratories are available at local health jurisdictions.

- **Bacteriological:** Collect and submit a sample for coliform analysis at least once every 12 months from the furthest end of the distribution system, or as directed by the Department.
- **Nitrate Samples:** After initial complete inorganic and physical analysis, collect and submit one nitrate sample from each source or well field at least once every 36 months.
- **Other Contaminants:** If treatment is provided for one or more inorganic chemical or physical contaminants, samples must be collected for the specific contaminant or contaminants before and after treatment. Frequency determined by the Department.

**Record Keeping:** The following records must be retained by system owners for the period of time specified:

- Bacteriological and Turbidity Analyses: 5 years
- Chemical Analyses (including Nitrates): retain as long as the system is in operation
- Other records of operation and analyses: 3 years
- Records of corrective action and public notifications: 3 years
- System evaluations and related material: 10 years

In some cases system owners are also required to maintain other records, including: daily chlorine residual; water treatment plant performance (if applicable, these records should include chemicals used and quantity, amount of water treated, and results of analyses); daily turbidity; monthly water use data; and other information as specified by the Department.

### **Reporting:**

- Water Facilities Inventory and Report Form (WFI): Each time information changes, such as a change in the number of homes connected to the system, or a change in owner/operator name, address or phone number, an updated WFI must be submitted to the Department. Updated WFIs must be submitted within 30 days of a change, and at least once every three years. This speeds up retrieval of information for your use or for lending institutions requiring information for their loan approval process.
- Bacteriological: When coliform is detected in a sample, the Department must be notified within ten days of owner notification by the laboratory. For Fecal coliform or E. Coli presence, the Department must be notified by the end of the next business day in which the owner is notified by the laboratory.
- Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) Violations: When an MCL violation occurs, the owner must notify the Department before the end of the next business day, and water system users within 14 days of receiving notification by the laboratory.
- Other Records: Operational records must be provided on request.

### **System Maintenance:**

- Sanitary Control Area: Protecting the water source from potential sources of contamination is one of the most important aspects of owning and operating a public water system. The owner of the system must maintain covenants protecting the source. These covenants generally cover a 100 foot radius around the well, but the size of the protected area may vary.
- System Operation and Reliability: All parts of the system must be maintained and operated in a way that minimizes failures and provides an

acceptable quality and quantity of water to all customers. Consumers must be informed of power outages, pump failures, or other system problems. The system must be protected from contamination due to cross-connections.

- **Conservation:** All systems are encouraged to promote water conservation. Newer systems may be required to incorporate specific conservation measures. Additionally, if system-wide water use exceeds 5,000 gallons per day or if the total property being irrigated by the system exceeds 1/2 acre, a water right permit must be obtained from the Department of Ecology.

**Satellite Management Agencies:** Under the provisions of Chapter 70.119A RCW, new Group B systems are in one of two categories. For systems in the last category, the department may require Satellite Management, if the system is not able to meet financial viability or other operating requirements.

- Those systems that are owned and/or operated by a state approved Satellite Management Agency; or
- Those systems receiving approvals conditioned by future management or ownership by a state approved Satellite Management Agency.

**Enforcement:** When a system is out of compliance with these rules, the Department may initiate appropriate enforcement actions, such as informing lending institutions and local building authorities that the system is inadequate. This may affect loan approvals and issuance of building permits.

**A Word of Caution:** If you decide to expand your system beyond the existing approved number of connections, plans must be submitted for approval. If you intend to eventually serve more than 14 residences, you should proceed as if your system were a Group A public water system, and follow the requirements identified in Chapter 246-290 WAC. Doing this protects your ability to expand in the future. It is also important for systems to budget and to establish rates that will meet all expenses. Contact the Department for more information on water system budgeting.

## What We're Doing

- Chapter 246-291 WAC, Group B Public Water Systems was amended effective November 1995. For key changes, please refer to the a copy of this WAC.
- New Group B design and guidance manuals are being developed to incorporate the changes to the Group B WAC.
- DOH and local health jurisdictions continue to develop Joint Plan of Operation agreements that identify responsibilities for the regulation of Group B public water systems.
- Effective July 1, 1996, DOH no longer regulates two-connection residential systems in those counties where the division has the lead on Group B systems. Local health jurisdictions, however, continue to have the option of exercising regulatory oversight of these systems.

## More Information

Simon Tung  
Department of Health Drinking Water Program 360-236-3132